

# Multicultural nursing - Jewish minority

## History of the Jewish minority in Europe

"The history of European Jews is the history of the problematic relationship of the majority society to an ethnic, religious and social minority. Jews were a minority in individual European countries, which, with their isolation and adherence to traditions and adherence to religious regulations, always formed a kind of "state within a state". Nevertheless, it is the Jews, and thus their history, that form a kind of pillar of European culture. E.g. The Ten Commandments are a very important moral code for Christians, even though they were originally taken from Judaism. Nevertheless, in the history of the Jews, we record less than happy interactions between them and Christian society. This animosity has its roots already in early Christianity, when Christians, as members of a newly formed religion, had to take an attitude towards the community from which they "came out".



Jewish candlestick - Menora

If we read the Old Testament, we can get a fairly good idea of the Old Testament Jews as a dynamic and very distinctive people with a specific religion and a very strong national feeling. We can say that in the period of the formation of the early church, that is, the first years after the death of Jesus until about the 90s of the 1st century AD, the Jews already functioned as an independent nation with their own laws, customs, traditions and the only monotheistic religion in ancient Rome.

The first Christians were eventually Jews who believed that the holy scriptures of Judaism indicated that Jesus Christ was the Messiah and thus got into theological disputes with the majority Jewish society, which often led to the exclusion of an individual from the community of the local synagogue, i.e. from the religious and social life. These theological arguments had the following character in rough outline:

- Christians presented their religion as the only way of salvation. From their point of view, keeping the Jewish law as such does not bring salvation. Salvation and the way to God is therefore in the hands of Christians.
- According to Christians, the Jews rejected the true way to God, their writings must be viewed in the light that Jesus is the Messiah. All the promises that the Jews received through the holy texts are thereby transferred to the Church, which is even called the new Israel.
- The Jews "murdered" God (meaning Jesus Christ) and thereby brought God's wrath upon themselves.

It is not surprising that despite the loving message of both religions, these issues were so burning and the position of both sides so sharp that they contributed to the negative view of the Jews. Later, when people from other nations could join the church, the alienation towards the Jews deepened even more.

From the fourth century, Christianity received official recognition and was established as the state religion. Thanks to the new status of Christianity and its subsequent spread across Europe, with the help of preaching, religious education and other activities of the church, a prejudice was consolidated in the subconscious of society, which placed the Jews in the role of the chosen nation, who brought the Holy Scriptures, but rejected their savior and will be judged at the time of the Apocalypse by God himself. From this position, there is little to the demonization of the Jews, who were already presented not only as "a stubborn nation that does not accept salvation", but were also accused of association with Satan as an enemy of God. Paradoxically, thanks to widespread Christian propaganda, this attitude was maintained even in places where there were no Jewish communities.

We can see the consequences of such an attitude in the first pogroms that took place across Europe during the Crusades, the primary focus of which was against Muslims (respectively pagans) and which had a political and economic reason. However, due to propaganda proclaiming the annihilation of all God's enemies, with the general expectation of the Apocalypse, and entrenched anti-Semitism, the "Judgment of God" on the Jews was carried out somewhat prematurely, and entire communities had the choice between accepting Christianity and death. Paradoxically, no "God's judgment" was carried out on the Jews in Jerusalem.

We can register another wave of stronger pogroms 300 years later, where it was not a case of fanatical mobs that looted in religious beliefs, but mainly of planned and pre-prepared murders of several dozen Jews or entire communities. In the background of the later pogroms, we must rather look for an uncertain economic and social situation. Many important representatives owed considerable sums of money to the Jews, and their liquidation not only relieved them of their debts, but was also a very enriching means. This also explains why the second wave of pogroms was not nearly as widespread as the first.

This period was also a period of plagues, when economic reasons were hidden behind a "worldwide" conspiracy by Jews to deliberately poison wells. In the cities where the slaughter took place, however, often no infection had yet appeared. This position has been officially rejected by both scholars and the Church.

Other interesting fates of the Jewish minority can be seen, for example, in Spanish and Portuguese territory, where in the 15th century there were forced baptisms and exile. It is worth mentioning the famous Spanish Inquisition, which, among other things, tried offenses such as secret observance of Jewish customs, for which the accused

could even be put to death. She also introduced rules that discriminated against the newly baptized (for the performance of individual functions, it was necessary to document from the family tree that entire generations had been baptized).

Even the beginning of the Protestant movement in the 16th century AD did not bring any self-reflection of the church or at least a different view of the Jewish minority in Europe. On the contrary, Luther, a very important reformer, after a futile attempt to convert the Jews to the "true faith", wrote several tracts in which he demanded restrictions on work, strict and vigorous treatment, or even expulsion from the country. The German Nazis also referred to his anti-Jewish views. Therefore, we cannot speak of a reformation of the view of the Jews even in early Protestantism, although not every reformer identified with this view of Luther.

Throughout medieval and early modern history we can see a fine line of relationship between Christianity and its official politics and the Jews. Thus, throughout the course of several centuries, a hostile attitude towards this community was cultivated in society, which worsened in crisis situations, when Jews (along with other minorities) were considered the architects of misfortune and often became scapegoats. Thus, the Jew was a symbol of "God's outcast" for ordinary society, and the excuse for their discrimination had precisely this theological element.

For the worldly power, the Jews represented a very valuable source of money and many times in history provided them with protection and privileges, but not every time these "privileges" meant at least equality with the rest of society. Their condition only improved in the 18th and 19th centuries AD, when, however, they obtained a change in their situation thanks to their influential position and considerable wealth. Nevertheless, anti-Semitism continued to manifest itself, for example, even in the times of the First Republic. Its climax then occurred in the 20th century with the advent of World War II.

If we look at the overall history, we see that in addition to its rich culture, this minority carries with it a great burden not only because of the tragic extermination in the 20th century, but also a kind of dark thin thread of conflict with the Christian society among which it lived for centuries.

## The Jewish minority today

*according to the Rising Sun model*

### Technological factors

Technological factors and their impact are consistent with the culture in which the given minority lives. Today, Jews as such are not considered a minority that stands on the fringes of society, on the contrary, they often achieve a very high level of education and have no difficulty integrating into society economically and socially.

*Nursing tips:* In the anamnesis, we will focus on the country and region where the patient lives. It is unnecessary to evaluate technological factors according to ethnicity.

### Religious and philosophical factors

Jews today, as in the past, range from accepting the religious opinion of the country they live in (e.g. accepting Christianity, atheism) to practicing an orthodox form of Judaism. In Judaism itself, we can note several currents that have a different character. We most often distinguish: orthodox, ultra-orthodox, reform and conservative Judaism. Furthermore, other groups such as the Samaritans and the Karaites join Judaism.

I am listing here the most common religious acts and holidays that are generally associated with Jewish culture and could affect normal hospital treatment.

- **Morning, afternoon and evening prayer:** The texts come from a prayer book called the Siddur. They are considered to replace the sacrifices that were previously offered in the Temple of Jerusalem. No special body position or world direction is needed. Women can wear scarves, men caps or hats. The head covering symbolizes the awe and humility that the believer feels in God's presence.
- **Shabbat - a day of rest:** Its message is rest and spiritual and mental renewal, which also takes place through prayer and Torah study. The prohibition of work is associated with Shabbat. The day of rest is also associated with the so-called oneg Shabbat - the pleasure of Shabbat. This includes, for example, sufficient sleep, holiday food and clothing... According to the Jewish calendar, Shabbat begins on Friday evening with the lighting of Shabbat candles and prayer, followed by an evening feast. In the morning, the Torah is read in the synagogue, followed by another feast (at lunchtime), and the evening also ends with a meal and Havdala - which begins with the lighting of a woven candle with four wicks. The fire should be the same one that was lit at the beginning of Shabbat. Shabbat is understood more as a community and family holiday.
- **Pilgrimage holidays** - there are three: Pesach, Shavuot and Sukkot. These holidays commemorate important events in Jewish history in connection with harvest celebrations.
  - Passover commemorates the liberation of the Jews from Egyptian slavery, in our country we can meet with the designation of the Feast of Unleavened Bread.
  - Shavuot or the Feast of Weeks - the celebration of the proclamation of the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai and the giving of the Torah to Moses. Historically, on this holiday, pilgrims brought the first fruits of their harvest to the Temple.
  - Sukkot, or the Feast of Tabernacles, is a reminder of the wandering in the desert before entering the Promised Land (Israel).

- **High Holidays** – These include Rosh Hashanah, or New Year's Day, and Yom Kippur, or the Day of Atonement. These holidays also include the days between them.
  - The New Year's holiday is a reminder that Jews have a covenant with God, that they should think about their deeds and that everyone will be judged for their deeds. It is therefore evident that it has a somewhat different character than our New Year's Eve.
  - On the Day of Atonement, in addition to the ban on work, it is customary to observe a strict all-day fast.
- Furthermore, in addition to these holidays **days of mourning**, Hanukkah and Purim are observed..
  - Hanukkah, also called the Festival of Lights, is a reminder of the miracle that happened in the Jerusalem temple after the Maccabean victory over the Syrians. It lasts for eight days and is celebrated between the end of November and the end of December.
  - Purim is a commemoration of the rescue of the Jews living in the Persian Empire from the massacre planned by Haman, the first minister there. Queen Esther was responsible for thwarting Haman's plans and saving her nation. This story is described in the Old Testament in the book of Esther. Purim is the most joyful Jewish holiday and is celebrated in February-March.
- One of the most recent holidays is Yom Hashoah, which was established on the day of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. This day commemorates the events of World War II.

*Nursing tips:* It is necessary to realize that the Jewish holidays are characterized by a very strong self-reflection of the Jews in their history. Every holiday has its meaning and it is known why and for what it is celebrated. I think that today's average medical staff does not have the knowledge to connect certain gestures and customs with the meaning they mean to a Jew. Therefore, I recommend that you immediately ask during the anamnesis whether there is anything in this respect that we can accommodate the patient (in connection with his faith). While we do not know much about Jewish holidays and spiritual needs, it is usually true that Jews profess their religion in the majority society in which they live. It is therefore highly probable that the patient himself will propose the most reasonable solution, which we can then discuss and adjust according to our possibilities.

Another factor I will mention is that the Jews as a community are well provided with medical care. Therefore, they visit "our" facilities only if the service in the community is not able to provide adequate medical care. It is also not a rare case that Jews do not indicate their nationality (or ethnicity) at all, and that we often find out that we have a patient of Jewish nationality only from relatives or from observation.

## Family and social factors

The Jewish community is more of a closed type. We may encounter the term Jewish community. Individual Jewish communities are registered in the Federation of Jewish Communities in the Czech Republic and may be legally subjective within the meaning of Act No. 3/2002 Coll. This community therefore acquires not only an identity in the sense of an ethnic community, but behaves in our society as a legal entity. Also thanks to this, it can provide very extensive services for its members. Its activities often include the care of monuments, the administration of the synagogue, the provision of cultural and religious events, social and health services and, last but not least, contact with the public.

Jewish families tend to be branched and tightly knit. It is typical, and somewhat unusual for us, that a Jewish family is often very attached to its family tree. There are even known cases where it is possible to read the family line up to 2000 years back.

The life of the family also includes such events as birth, entering adulthood and death.

- **Birth:** The birth of a child is not only a matter for the family, but for the whole community. Male children are circumcised as a symbol of the covenant between Israel and God. It also expresses the idea that the physical body is subject to the moral law. A woman cleanses herself 6 weeks after giving birth. The firstborn son is "redeemed", that is, the father gives symbolic silver coins to the synagogue. This custom is rooted in history, when the firstborn son belonged to God.
- **Entering adulthood:** In Judaism, a person is considered an adult from the age of 13. On the Saturday after his 13th birthday, the son reads from the Torah for the first time in the synagogue, the girls will present a discussion on a topic from the Torah. There is a big feast after the service. Thus, from the 13th birthday, a Jew is fully responsible for his actions.
- **Death and illness:** Visiting the sick and attending funerals are among the basic religious duties. Here, too, it is a community affair, where the main responsibility is usually taken by a group of volunteers (Chevra kadiša), who provide material, social and spiritual care to the seriously ill and then organize the funeral of the deceased. The dying person is visited by a clergyman and gives him the last confession of sins and a prayer similar to what happens in Christianity.

*Nursing Tips:* Jewish families are very willing to get involved in the patient's nursing. Involvement in the patient's treatment regimen is therefore not at all complicated, on the contrary, we can use their help.

## Cultural values and lifestyle

Lifestyle and cultural factors are very much intertwined with religion and derive from the extent and type of Judaism an individual practices and, of course, from the majority society in which they live. Compared to the majority Czech society, internal values are more oriented towards family, community and history.

Jews are very oriented towards culture as such. Most of them often visit theaters, concerts and are interested in art. They are constantly enriching their culture. We can also add to the lifestyle a rather special diet, governed by a set of rules called kashrut, which has its roots in the Jewish religion. Another interesting thing about the Jewish

ethnicity is that they use not only the language used by the majority to communicate, but also Hebrew and even English. additional languages. This need arose mainly because Jews live in different states.

## Political and legal factors

Apart from the Jewish communities in the Czech Republic, the Jewish community as a whole is not politically active. Both individual and community activities are permitted within Judaism.

## Economic factors

In this area, there is no difference between the minority and the majority.

## Educational factors

In the past, Jews were very often educated in their schools focused mainly on religious education. Currently, there are also Jewish educational programs (kindergarten, seminars, courses), but they recognize and do not oppose the education of the majority.

## Glossary

*Torah* – we distinguish between the written and the oral part (Jews have a very strong oral tradition). The scope of the Torah covers the five books of Moses in the Old Testament. The Oral Torah then includes halag and agada.

*Halacha* – is a summary of religious law. It was first formed from oral tradition by Yehuda ha-Nasi into a work called the Mishnah. The discussion of religious law, but also the agada, is recorded in the Gemara.

*The Talmud* – it consists of the Mishnah and the Gemara. It is therefore a summary of religious law with subsequent analysis and discussion. There are two types: Jerusalem, older and Babylonian, younger.

*Tanach* – the most common designation of the Hebrew Bible. Includes Torah, Prophets and Writings.

*Mitzvot* – 613 commandments that establish the rules for the operation of religious law, rituals and morality.

*Samaritans* – one of the oldest ethnic groups in the Middle East. Their faith is very similar to classical Judaism. The biggest difference is that they do not have the institution of rabbis - the main interpretation of the Talmud rests with the priests.

*Karaites* – An offshoot of Judaism, often referred to as a sect that recognizes only the texts of the Old Testament.

*Chevre Kadisha* – Jewish funeral fraternity, whose members care for the dying and organize the funeral.

*Kashrut* – a set of rules for ritual purity, it applies especially to food. The name is derived from the word kosher = suitable (in the Ashkenazi pronunciation, the word kosher is known in our environment).

## Links

### related articles

- Multicultural nursing
- Nursing care for Roma patients

### Reference

BERN, Martin and Schulin ERNST, et al. The Jewish minority in history. 1st edition. Votobia, 1997.

### External links

- [www.kehilaprag.cz](http://www.kehilaprag.cz) (<http://www.kehilaprag.cz/cs>)

### References

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